

The new exodus: a narrative paradigm for understanding soul care.(Report)

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A consensus exists among biblical scholars that the original Exodus event became paradigmatic for Israel's later self-identity. Isaiah, among other Old Testament writers, made extensive use of Exodus language re-framed for his context. In the New Testament, Jesus is the New Joshua who breaks the chains of slavery once and for all. St. Paul makes it quite clear that this is nothing less than a New Exodus. However, this narrative may be faithfully appropriated in a contemporary context, and with particular relevance to soul care. With rising interest in narrative theology, as well as narrative approaches to psychotherapy, it is worth considering whether a kind of master narrative--The New Exodus--might provide conceptual space in which theologians and psychologists can explore the enduring question of how people change.

The Exodus as an Ongoing Biblical Paradigm

For some time, biblical scholars have been intrigued by the recurrence of Exodus language in Scripture. The theme of "New Exodus" has been the subject of a number of scholarly works (Holland, 2004; Watts, 1997; Wright, 1992). A scholarly consensus exists around the idea that the first Exodus was paradigmatic for God-followers of future generations. Throughout Scripture, one can hear the echoes of the first Exodus in recurrent ideas, themes, and thought patterns. It is difficult, in fact, to read the Bible without seeing this language on every page.

Of course, the original Exodus might have been the only Exodus if it were not for the painfully stubborn hearts of the rescued Israelites. The Jewish rabbi and scholar Kushner (2006) writes, "The journey from the confinement of Egypt to the fulfillment of reaching the Promised Land could have been completed in a matter of months. But the evolution of a people from the mindset of slavery to being comfortable with the obligations and uncertainties of freedom would take much longer" (p. 23). This "evolution," of sorts, has continued for the people of God throughout the ages. What is clear is that the generation that reached the Promised Land quickly fell into the same old patterns learned by their fathers in

Egypt. The people of God, it seems, would need a larger Exodus vision. Thus, the Exodus journey becomes for the prophets eschatological and cosmic in scope, with fulfillment in the Promised Land of a new heavens and a new earth. This larger vision would become the New Exodus.

For this reason, the original Exodus story became foundational not only for Isaiah and the prophets, but for the Psalmists, for the chroniclers of Israel's history, for the Gospel authors, for Peter and John, and not least for the Apostle Paul. The Exodus narrative became a map, of sorts, which has been used repeatedly throughout Scripture and church history to guide pilgrims in their journey to the eschatological Garden City. Therefore, it is critical for contemporary pilgrims to be immersed in the original Exodus story and its biblical appropriations in order to learn how to live and love faithfully today.

The New Exodus as a Paradigm for Soul Care

In today's complex ministry milieu, many pastors feel prepared to pass ordination exams but inadequately prepared for the complexities of spiritual formation, soul care, and counseling (DeGroat, 2008). Counselors, on the other hand, often lack adequate biblical/theological moorings, with the unfortunate result of Scripture being used to proof-text or baptize psychological theory. Pastors, counselors, mentors, spiritual directors, discipleship leaders, and others in the field of soul care often wrestle with divergent and sometimes competing paradigms and practices. Anderson and Reese (1999) have shown the need for both coherency and distinction. A New Exodus model of soul care roots a coherent soul care perspective in the narrative of Scripture, yet provides conceptual space for variations which may be appropriated faithfully within the different vocations of soul care.

Brueggemann (1997) has argued that as the therapist invites a client to shift from one narrative (unhealthy childhood relationships) to another (healthy adult relationships), so a preacher invites her parishioner to leave his old narrative and to live into the Biblical script as a new and better narrative. However, honest Christian practitioners of soul care, whether in a secular psychotherapy clinic or a church office, can benefit from Brueggemann's insight about preaching. For even the most biblically illiterate therapist, if she honestly believes the biblical story, must reconcile the many different psychological proposals on psychopathology and health with the biblical narrative. And, she must have a coherent framework with which she can invite growth and change in her clients. All in the vocation of soul care--whether preachers or therapists, mentors or spiritual directors--must learn to offer the beauty and benefits of this "alternative world" of the biblical script with "great artistry, care, and boldness" (Brueggemann, 2007, p. 35).

How one appropriates the biblical narrative has been the subject of some scholarly discussion. Wells (2004), a theologian and ethicist, proposes the language of "improvisation" in the context of theatrical performance. In the theatrical context, actors who are thoroughly acquainted to the script and familiar with one another's patterns can step off the page, so to speak, while at the same time staying faithful to the original pattern and intent of the script. Walsh and Keesmat (2004) connect theatrical improvisation to faithful Christian living, noting that "if we are to faithfully live out the biblical drama, then we will need to develop the imaginative skills necessary to improvise on this cosmic stage of creational redemption" (p. 134). This requires Christians to indwell the original story so deeply that its patterns become second nature.

This, of course, does not mean simple repetition of the original script. As Walsh and Keesmat (2004) state, "It would be the height of infidelity and interpretive cowardice to simply repeat verbatim ... the earlier passages of the play" (p. 134). Rather, faithful improvisation requires an intimate acquaintance with the patterns and themes of the original narrative. The problem, however, with contemporary invitations to faithful improvisation is that they offer little more than an invitation to the imaginative enterprise of improvisation. It is important to delve more deeply, noting the unique pattern of the original narrative and its relevance for faithful improvisation in the area of soul care today. The original Exodus story, along with its faithful improvisations within Scripture, offers clues. While it is impossible to highlight all of the clues available, five major signposts emerge on the New Exodus map that are worthy of elucidation, offering the promise of help and wisdom to those who provide soul care. The five major signposts that guide the improvisational New Exodus journey are woundedness, wickedness, purgation, illumination, and union.

Woundedness

If there were signposts along the New Exodus way, the word 'woundedness' might be placed at Egypt and the word 'wickedness' at Sinai. The struggle for the Israelites in Egypt is not explained primarily in terms of sin and responsibility. Of course, the fact that Israel finds herself in Egypt in the first place, as well as the fact that she stays, clearly involves wickedness, sin and human responsibility. However, what we find in Scripture many times along the way is that God will withhold from making an immediate point in order to let a larger pattern unfold. In this case, Israel would soon enough learn the tough lessons of her sin in the wilderness. For now, God shows mercy to a victim, not judgment to a sinner.

As the story is told in Exodus 1, God finds Israel in an oppressed state. Once "fertile and prolific" (Exod 1:7), Israel is now stifled by the back-breaking oppression of Pharaoh. Anyone who has ever known abuse in her history can

relate. Of course, in this story God had already been working behind the scenes in the life of Moses to write a grand story of redemption. Yet, Israel's present pain is palpable. And God's appearance on the scene of redemptive history shows His great concern for those in need. Indeed, God's care for the alien and the oppressed becomes a lesson to the Israelites later, as they are called to live and love as faithful improvisers of God's patient love (Exod. 22:21). The redeemed are set free to love others in the name of God.

An emphasis on woundedness ought not lead to a minimization of sin or an emphasis on victimization. Some counselors struggle with the idea of victimization, in part, because the Augustinian narrative of sin and responsibility has been usurped by the modern therapeutic narrative of victimization, entitlement, and narcissism. While the contemporary social critique has validity, a biblical approach to soul care must emerge from the biblical narrative, not the cultural narrative. God cares for victims and makes provision for them (see Exod 22:22-24; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 10:14; Ps. 68:5; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 22:3). Anyone who practices soul care from a distinctly biblical narrative is challenged to take abuse, oppression, and human suffering as seriously as God does. Indeed, God sees the dignity beneath the struggle.

With this in mind, those who practice soul care can sit with a rape victim, an abused spouse, a wrongfully-terminated employee, or a child of neglectful parents and offer the loving presence and care of a compassionate God. Their core dignity as image-bearers can be seen beneath the difficulty and depravity that looms large. And care can be offered modeling the three main ways in which God met the Israelites in her affliction while in Egypt. The three main ways provide appropriate boundaries for contemporary improvisation.

First, God recognized and validated Israel's affliction. Perhaps, this is where Carl Rogers pitched his tent, losing sight of the larger narrative. But it is not a bad place to start. The suffering need a listening ear, not a set of theological propositions. Faced with those kinds of friends, Job lamented that they were as "undependable as intermittent streams" (Job 6:15). God's presence, as well as the presence of a friend, a counselor, or pastor, makes an important theological statement even in the silence. It is a demonstration of incarnation, a visible redemptive presence in the form of another human being who is awake and attuned to the present pain and inherent dignity of a fellow sufferer.

Second, God demonstrated His concern that good and evil be seen for what they are. God is unambiguous when it comes to calling out Egypt's evil against Israel. Likewise, loving friends, pastors, and counselors must speak into suffering at some point, calling abuse what it is, or showing anger at obvious injustices. The Israelites have no doubt whose side God is on. Speaking to injustice shows a

heart for specific human oppression, as well as the larger creational groaning (Rom. 8) within a world desperately in need of restoration and shalom.

Finally, God, through his human instrument Moses, stirs in the Israelites a longing for something more than their slavery, enticing their appetites with a vision of a land flowing with milk and honey. It is a privilege that those who do soul care have to step in to the pain of another human being, and declare, "You were made for so much more." Carnell (1999) argues that this theology of longing or desire became the hallmark of C.S. Lewis's theology, as Lewis was convinced that longing was the lifeline to freedom, joy, and all of the benefits of spiritual health.

In sum, the first stages of soul care represent an opportunity to build relationship through understanding and validation, through an honest assessment and empathetic response to the circumstances, and through an invitation to long for something more. Indeed, the early stages of soul care are critically dependent on the faithful presence and concern of the counselor, pastor, or spiritual advisor (Pembroke, 2002).

Wickedness

However, for one to progress in maturity and health, more is required. The Exodus narrative animates this process well. Alas, only moments outside of the prison walls of Egyptian slavery, Israel's gratitude turns to bitterness. She has just been taken up into the arms of a just and loving Father, and carried through the perilous waters of the Red Sea. However, soon after she is let down out of the Father's arms, she forgets His tender-loving care, becoming like a spoiled and ungrateful child.

This, of course, is the fear some Christian counselors have when they see modern psychology overemphasizing victimization. In fact, it might be easy for a counselor to react to such obvious self-centeredness with a quick and sharp rebuke. Interestingly, the narrative leads in a different direction. God's patience is remarkable in Israel's early days (Exod. 15-17) in contrast to their later stage of development (Num. 14), as He responds to their grumbling with the provisions of food and drink, and promises of more. Likewise, practitioners of soul care ought to show patience and restraint early on, particularly with people who are new to the process (pastoral care, counseling, spiritual direction) and who show less emotional maturity.

Yet, in time and with "great artistry, care, and boldness" (Brueggemann, 1997, p. 35), the clear requirements of the new narrative must be delivered as they relate to the situation of the specific person. At Sinai, God delivers His requirements. To guide an Israelite into faithful living within the new narrative, He gives the law. He gives it not in isolation, but in the context of the story of care and concern, rescue

and redemption. These requirements, in turn, shine a mirror on the heart of God's people, exposing their ambivalence toward God and His way. Many people want to be coddled, and do not want to face the difficult choices required to switch narratives.

Dempster (2003) notes rightly that, "Sinai, not Egypt, is Israel's largest roadblock to Canaan" (p. 101). Herein is the paradox. God's love is infinitely merciful, but it comes with a commitment to purifying Israel and making her more lovely, more radiant, and more beautiful than she could ever achieve on her own. Sinai lays out the game plan for God's restoration project. Its message is "Walk in this way, and your life will flourish." However, as many therapists, pastors, and others who do soul care know, this is where a person will often balk.

At some point, those who provide soul care must honestly present a person with an assessment of her obstacles to growth, both external and internal. The internal obstacles, however, can be the biggest ones. It takes little experience working with abuse victims to notice that their own self-sabotage is often far more powerful than the initial harm that took place. This concept gains credibility when it comes from the mouth of a holocaust survivor like Viktor Frankl (2006), who writes, "In the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person a prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone" (pp. 104-105). The enemy on the outside ought not distract one from the enemy within.

"The enemy is in (emphasis mine) the victim," Allender (1992) writes, "leading to broken relationships, loneliness, depression, eating disorders, promiscuity, sexual coldness, and frightening rage" (p. 58). The human heart is bent on finding its own way, charting its own course, concocting its own cure. Tripp (2008) argues that "the DNA of sin is deception," a failure "to see ourselves with accuracy" (p. 32). When the person doing soul care redirects a person to the larger problem - the enemy within - she may face the harsh reality that people simply do not want to see how they perpetuate the problem. Egypt is hard. Sinai is far worse.

While the wickedness of self-sabotage is revealed at this stage, so also is the wickedness of sin-management. Some receive the counsel of their pastor or counselor with great joy--"I can do this!" They love Sinai, because they want something concrete. A relationship is risky, but a task can be controlled, and Sinai presents clear tasks. Pitching one's tent at Sinai might amount to a choice to turn soul care into behavior management. People crave this clarity of direction, evidenced in the many popular Christian and secular programs which offer life and health in three easy steps. Yet, the point is missed. Sinai's law is a mirror to the wickedness of the soul. God knew that Israel would fail (Deut. 31), Likewise,

an honest counselor knows his sex addict will fail even after multiple admonitions not to. Perfect obedience is impossible.

God, after all, is not after external perfection, but a brokenness of heart (Matthew 5). Sinai was not God's attempt at behavior modification, but an invitation to long for Eden's shalom (Psalm 119). Those who practice soul care must always remember this. The call to look at sin is never intended to guilt or shame a person into becoming compliant, but comes as an invitation to live into the larger story of God and His shalom-producing grace. Sin management always leads to external performance and self-reliance. However, dealing with depth of heart-wickedness always leads to Jesus, the well that produces life-giving water.

For the practitioner of soul care, improvising this part of the narrative can be very difficult. Self-sabotage is very powerful, and when confronted with ways in which they perpetuate their woundedness, some people will simply leave, returning to their former slavery. For sin-managers, the temptation is to think they have figured out soul care, mastered its art, and achieved its goals. Once again, soul care requires artful and skillful improvisation based on the person's unique story and circumstances. However, the overall trajectory of the narrative remains the same. And with that, a wilderness awaits, promising deeper refinement through its dark night.

Purgation

Thus far, the courageous Exodus traveler has dared to leave the tyranny of Pharaoh's rule and Egypt's slavery. However, the patterns learned in slavery die hard, and Sinai exposes the human propensity to perpetuate the old patterns, or to choose surface-level cures. Another stage of development is needed.

Thus, God provides a crucible of growth and maturation--the wilderness. After Sinai comes the wilderness, a dark and barren terrain where helplessness, fear, and confusion reign. For the Israelites, it might well have felt like God had abandoned them. The joy of God's covenant embrace at Sinai is but a distant memory for hungry and thirsty pilgrims braving the difficulties of the desert. Dempster (2003) writes, "As soon as the journey from Sinai to the land of promise commences, the people move from disaster to disaster, or, in the telling place names given to the first few stops along the way, from 'Fiery Blaze' (Num. 11:3) to 'Graveyard' (Num. 11:34)" (p.11). The response of the people is not one of trust, but of anger. They demand to return to Egypt (Num. 14:14), and threaten mutiny if their leaders do not comply. God's heart is to have compassion and forgive (Num. 14:17-19), yet the reality is that His people are not yet ready to enter the land as mature image-bearers and ambassadors of the King. They will need more time in the desert. They will have to face their demons.

Brueggemann (1995) contends that the Psalms put a voice to this kind of wilderness "helplessness," noting that in therapy, one must become acquainted with the depths of darkness in order to experience the light of new life. Confusion, in fact, is necessary for the Christian journey toward maturation. The desert is not a mere complication along the way, but a necessary time of purgation, cleansing, and honest self-assessment. Certainly, the Israelites of old hated it, and rejected God because of it. That is the human temptation. It makes little sense to us that pain is necessary. In a more philosophical moment, C.S. Lewis (2001a) wrote that "pain ... is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (p. 91). And then he experienced the excruciating pain of his wife's death. This time, his musings were less philosophical and more raw. Lewis (2001b) writes:

But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain and what do you find? A door slammed in your face and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that silence. (p. 6)

Lewis's silence is the dark night of the soul, the moment Jesus Himself experienced when prior to His crucifixion He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Why the purging, though? St. John of the Cross, the 16th century Spanish mystic, noted that God leads people into the dark night of the soul in order to purge them of "unnatural affection and attachment" in order to once-and-for-all attain "unrestricted freedom of spirit." In other words, God is not sadistic. He does not enjoy seeing people in pain. However, wilderness experiences are necessary because they cultivate a depth of character and honest relationship with God. Popular, best-selling Christian self-help books tend to overlook this "dark night," preferring to sanitize and even glamorize the Christian life. This, however, is not the way of the Exodus, nor is it the way of the Cross, Christ's climatic embodiment of the New Exodus way. Our growth requires a wilderness.

This only makes sense in the context of the larger Exodus narrative, and within our life narratives. The first pilgrims to emerge from Egypt were habituated to slavery. Like many today who suffer and seek therapy, they had not only heard the message of their abuser but had become that message. They lived as if they were still slaves under an oppressive regime. Sinai gave them the language for life under a new King. It gave them a tutorial on freedom, on love, on blessing, and on community. The law gave them the words, but the words had not yet penetrated. Palmer (2005) tells this story using an old rabbinic proverb.

A disciple asks the rebbe, "Why does Torah tell us to 'place these words upon your hearts'? Why does it not tell us to place these holy words in our hearts?" The rebbe answers, "It is because as we are, our hearts are closed, and we

cannot place the holy words in our hearts. And there they stay until, one day, the heart breaks and the words fall in."

The wilderness invites brokenness, a brokenness that creates space for the law to be written on the heart. Perhaps, this is why Jesus re-frames the law in His Sermon on the Mount by beginning with, "Blessed are the broken." Life emerges out of death.

The Exodus narrative invites pastors and counselors to see soul care through a particular kind of lens, one that cuts against the grain of popular spirituality. Living into this narrative is harder, and requires a brutal honesty and courageous realism. Yet, the hope is that the one who emerges out of the wilderness crucible will know a depth of surrender to God, a new dependency, a humbled heart, and a more hopeful spirit in the end.

Illumination

Wiersbe (1992) quotes the great 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who wrote:

Night journeys, both actual and spiritual, may fall to the lot of those who carry Jesus with them. Even the Son of God, who is pre-eminent above all others, must depart into Egypt like the rest of the family and must only come out when He is called. Let us not wonder if we, also, have to go down to Egypt, and go in a hurry, and go by night, and are allowed to stay there for many a day. We, too, shall be called out in due time by Him whose call is effectual. The angel who leads us into Egypt will bring us word to come out. (p. 97)

Spurgeon was on to something. For Spurgeon, the wilderness was much like going back to Egypt, back into exile, in order to learn the way of suffering with which Jesus was acquainted. In the wilderness, people sometimes feel hopelessly mired in their enslavements. The hope, of course, is that struggling people will emerge from this darkness, just as Jesus did, and experience the illumination that is offered on the other side.

Illumination is a tricky term, because for some it might suggest that real spirituality involves some sort of Gnostic awakening reserved for only a few who have more deep and profound experiences of God. However, as it was used by spiritual writers of old, illumination assumes that every person experiences pain and struggle, and every person has the opportunity to emerge from the darkness with hope. Of course, many do not. As has been said, for some the choice to return to the habitual enslavements of Egypt seems easier. Indeed, God's way seems like a cruel bait-and-switch that offers life in a Promised Land but delivers

misery. Trust is hard. Illumination is the fruit of trust, ripened in the rocky terrain and difficult weather of the wilderness.

Nouwen (1995) speaks to this, offering the metaphor of clenched fists. Our angry and self-protective fists, he notes, are created out of life's pain, and show a rugged determination to take life into our own hands, to craft our own solutions. Trust requires opening one's clenched fists, releasing the burdens that are carried, and assuming a posture of relationship and receptivity before God and others. Yet, he empathizes with our reluctance. He writes, "It is a long spiritual journey of trust... Much has happened in your life to make all those fists" (p. 18). This long journey is akin to Israel's journey. She, too, walked the long path through the wilderness before relinquishing her control over the journey. Iain Matthew (1995) writes, "It is not surprising that the admission comes to us slowly: it took Israel most of her history to learn it" (p. 69).

Illumination, in its most basic sense, is an opening of one's hands. It indicates a posture of trust-- "God, I surrender myself and my own failed solutions, and embrace You." It recognizes that staying in Egypt and living out of the addictions and enslavements of the past only bring a more fatal pain. Purgation is redemptive, ultimately. In being stripped of the things that bind, one is freed to live more radically for others. After a time of lamenting the loss of his son, theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff (1987) wrote, "In the valley of suffering, despair and bitterness are brewed. But there also character is made. The valley of suffering is the vale of soul-making" (p. 97). Illumination assumes that by being broken, we are actually freed up to love and serve others not merely because we should, but because we have tasted God's love through the trial. St. Paul wrote,

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:3-5)

Illumination, it must be emphasized, is not some special level of spirituality. In fact, young and old experience tastes of this freedom every day. However, fewer live here. Nouwen was right. Living self-protectively is simply easier, at times. Yet, the Exodus narrative opens a door of hope. Within the narrative, life emerges out of death. Across the Jordan lies a land where Eden's memory is alive and well, where tastes of hope and glory whet one's appetite for the yet-to-come New Earth.

Union

Every so often, you come across a person who seems to live perpetually in a place of intimate connection with God and authentic connection with others. In

her presence, you can rest and be yourself. Her anxieties are few. She is well-acquainted with pain and loss, and bears some of the marks. Yet, she is not bitter. You sense that she has gone to battle with God, and received His blessing.

Union, like Illumination, is not an indication of some Gnostic awakening, or superior spirituality. Often, the person who lives here is very ordinary. Sometimes, as writers like Jean Vanier and Henri Nouwen like to note, she has more in common with the mentally handicapped than the tenured Professor of Spirituality. She knows her own brokenness. Her sin is not any less than another, but it has less power over her. The great 16th century reformer, St. Teresa of Avila, said that with age her experience of intimate union with God was not as ecstatic and rapturous as it once had been, but became more ordinary.

In a New Exodus approach to soul care, it is important to emphasize that the entire process reaches toward a goal of union and communion with God and others. The goal is ultimately relational in nature. Egypt represents the very opposite of union. The Fall shifted the gravitational pull of relationship, turning humanity inward, bending the heart away from God and others and to self-fulfillment. According to Jenson (2006), this is the classic theological notion of *homo incurvatus in se*, marking the effects of sin as a human being turned inward on himself, rather than outward to God and others. Depression, anxiety, apathy, addiction, and other human struggles have complex etiologies, but what they all have in common is the destruction of relationship. Maturation and growth, therefore, is more complex than applying a cognitive-behavioral technique, or memorizing a few verses of Scripture. Indeed, it is fostered by a movement from the self-sabotage of Egypt to the relational self-surrender of Union. How this happens in the context of pastoral care, spiritual direction, or therapy may be nuanced, but the over-arching movement is consistent.

Union represents life as it is supposed to be. In his excellent treatise on sin, Plantinga (1995) calls sin the "vandalism of shalom." Shalom represents what humanity was made to be in Eden, but also what she is meant to become in anticipation of the New Eden. The process of counseling and soul care, in this respect, might be best explained in terms of image-of-God restoration in humanity. Union is best explained, then, as human beings becoming what they were intended to be. Two main facets of this rise to the surface. First, humans were made to image a Trinitarian God. The image of God is social and relational in nature, and humans become what they were made to be as they live out union with God and others (Grenz, 2001). Second, the image of God implies human rule and ambassadorship over creation (Middleton, 2005). Thus, humans become what they were made to be as they live out their God-ordained purpose in the world. However, the latter is predicated on the former. The maturing human being lives out his new identity relationally, and thus missionally--for the sake of

the world. His rule and reign as God's ambassador is fueled by his spiritual hygiene and health in relationship. Shalom expands throughout communities and into the world as human beings relate and rule as restored image-bearers.

Union, as is evident, is elusive. The heart is bent on its own agenda. The risk of relationship is too great for some. The dignity of rule is too much. Twisted versions of relationship and rule can be seen in the various forms of human pathology. However, the work of soul care in its various forms finds its hope in the possibility of union on this side of the new heavens and new earth. Living into the promise of union may be the hardest thing a redeemed soul does, but it promises a foretaste of Trinitarian love that the human heart so desperately longs for.

Concluding Thoughts on the New Exodus Journey

How might a New Exodus model add to the ongoing discussion of the relationship between Scripture and soul care? Three main reasons come to the fore.

First, this model provides an extended biblical pattern for growth and change. Often, verses relating to soul care are plucked out of Scripture with little context, and related to contemporary issues in a prescriptive manner. The New Exodus model is not prescriptive, but suggestive, inviting faithful improvisation and appropriation within different contexts.

Second, the Exodus narrative finds improvisation and appropriation within Scripture itself, justifying its use as an ongoing paradigm for Christian growth and sanctification. Indeed, Christ Himself participated in the New Exodus journey (Wright, 1992). This opens the door for further elaboration with contributions from both practitioners of soul care (counselors, pastors, etc.) and biblical scholars.

Third, the narrative form of the New Exodus model invites a larger narrative analysis of one's life. Soul care, in this scenario, requires something more than cognitive or behavioral prescriptions, but wades into the deeper waters of one's story, which may include family-of-origin issues, abuse, and more. Further, it recognizes the wilderness moments of life where prescriptive answers simply do not work, and where biblical lament is the only appropriate response. The New Exodus narrative, in other words, is both specific enough to provide a map for growth and maturity, and general enough to invite different expressions of emotional response and engagement.

However, the model will need further clarity and study on two main issues. First, while the five signposts of the New Exodus journey provide a general structure to human growth and maturity, it is clear that for most the journey is not very linear. Faithful improvisation for the sake of contemporary soul care requires significant

artistry and wisdom as well as further elaboration, which is outside of the scope of this introductory essay. Clearly, those who practice soul care in its various forms meet people at different stages of the journey, and often see people reverse course, jump stages, or never progress. Further work will need to be done elaborating on this aspect of the New Exodus model.

Second, a New Exodus model assumes that growth is slow, and that wilderness experiences are normative. To be sure, in a time where brief therapies reign, techniques sell, and insurance companies reward the fast fix, this proposal runs counter to popular wisdom. Best-selling Christian books, in fact, offer blessing in short order for those who follow the suggested biblical prescription. For many, it is a hard sell to embrace the notion that God writes stories that include wilderness struggle.

That said, this paradigm opens up new vistas for conversation among psychologists and theologians, pastors and spiritual directors. With the growing interest in both narrative theology and narrative approaches to therapy, perhaps the master narrative of the New Exodus can provide a bridge, offering meaningful engagement around both the text of Scripture as well as the text of the soul.

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